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President: Mr. HENZE (Germany)
(Vice-President)

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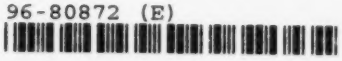

The meeting was called to order at 3.20 p.m.

COORDINATION OF THE POLICIES AND ACTIVITIES OF THE SPECIALIZED AGENCIES AND OTHER BODIES OF THE UNITED NATIONS SYSTEM RELATED TO THE FOLLOWING THEMES (continued) (E/1996/4 and Corr.1, E/1996/18 and Add.1)

(a) COORDINATION OF THE UNITED NATIONS SYSTEM ACTIVITIES FOR POVERTY ERADICATION (continued) (E/1996/61)

Mr. MOODY (International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD)) said that IFAD viewed the rural poor as potential contributors rather than as a burden to national economies. Given the proper tools, public infrastructure and access to credit and training, the productive capacities of the poor could be harnessed.

Over 1 billion urban and rural poor currently suffered from malnutrition and were forced to survive on the equivalent of less than one dollar per day, and by the year 2025 that figure might well double. Despite foreseeable advances in agricultural science and technology, the collective demand for food would be in excess of even the most optimistic food supply projections. Accordingly, a highly coordinated strategy was needed to avert widespread food deprivation and overuse of fragile land, water and forest resources. Improving access to food was also crucial to alleviating hunger and poverty in rural areas, and IFAD recognized that increased total food supply must be combined with local improvements in public infrastructure, storage facilities and marketing opportunities.

Given the direct link between poverty and environmental degradation, IFAD designed projects which incorporated conservation-based sustainable agriculture in order to assist the rural poor to protect their precious natural resources. It had incorporated the goals of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development in its work, was assisting countries to implement the International Convention on Desertification and was collaborating with other United Nations agencies and programmes to attack poverty and preserve the environment simultaneously.

The provision of financial services to small farmers, rural women and village artisans was a very effective tool used by IFAD to increase self-reliance, economic well-being and nutritional standards. Access to credit to acquire tangible productive assets was crucial to development in local economies with a labour surplus. IFAD was continuously fine-tuning its micro-financing schemes to develop innovative ways of providing financial services tailored to diverse societies and cultures. Through a new model for world banking, even poor rural communities had access to a comprehensive range of financial services. Furthermore, IFAD, along with the World Bank and several bilateral donors, had joined a consultative group on assisting the poorest and was working to replicate micro-financing programmes as widely as possible.

Partnership with non-governmental organizations was essential to the on-the-ground success of IFAD projects, especially in remote rural areas. IFAD cooperated with non-governmental organizations that used sustainable indigenous methods and locally based innovative technologies which could be reproduced on a larger scale. Non-governmental organizations also had a special capacity to form and maintain community groups which involved the beneficiaries in the design and implementation of projects. By providing cost-effective availability of credit, training, access to low-cost technologies and basic local infrastructure, IFAD was assisting small farmers, rural women and the landless to overcome the constraints of poverty and hunger.

Mr. JELE (South Africa) said that his delegation endorsed the remarks made by the representative of Costa Rica on behalf of the Group of 77 and China. Turning to paragraph 66 of document E/1996/61, which stressed that it was the primary responsibility of the Government of each country to define its own poverty eradication strategy, he said that his Government fully concurred with that view and had already put in place a comprehensive programme for poverty reduction. Through a special reconstruction and development fund, substantial resources had been allocated to socio-economic priority needs. Other funds had been diverted from consumption to capital expenditure, especially in the areas of housing, transport and water supply. Projects included providing a daily meal to 5 million children and free health services for children up to six years of age and pregnant women.

In keeping with the recommendation in paragraph 72, his Government, in collaboration with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), had nearly

completed its country strategy note, which constituted the overall framework of its cooperation with the United Nations system and the donor community. Resources from multilateral sources and donors had been integrated into the budget process to improve the effectiveness of the poverty eradication initiatives.

While welcoming the resident coordinator system and the establishment of thematic working groups and of a consultative framework between the United Nations system and the Bretton Woods institutions at the field level, his delegation hoped that such assistance would not be accompanied by new conditionalities. His Government endorsed the view that the United Nations system and the Bretton Woods institutions should promote the mainstreaming of a gender perspective in the formulation and implementation of economic policies and of all programmes aimed at poverty eradication.

One of the most meaningful ways in which the international community, and the multilateral financial institutions in particular, could contribute to the eradication of poverty in Africa was by effectively addressing the onerous debt burden. As long as the scarce financial resources available to the least developed countries were tied to servicing their debt, those countries would be unable to devote substantial amounts of resources to development. Close collaboration between the United Nations development system and the multilateral financial institutions was needed, and his delegation fully endorsed the United Nations System-wide Special Initiative on Africa.

Unless efforts to achieve poverty eradication were actively supported by the international community and underpinned by a substantial, predictable and continuous flow of resources, they were bound to fail. Any successful poverty eradication strategy must also be based on sustainable, balanced and human-centred development.

His delegation supported the call for greater coordination of poverty eradication activities at the field level, at United Nations Headquarters and throughout the United Nations system. The strengthening of coordination between the United Nations and the Bretton Woods institutions would enhance the leading role of those institutions in economic policy and decision-making, thereby increasing the capacity to eradicate poverty at a global level.

Ms. WILLIAMS-MANIGAULT (United States of America), referring to section I of the report of the Secretary-General (E/1996/61), said that her

delegation fully supported the premise that countries were responsible for formulating their own strategies for sustainable development and that the United Nations system must align its assistance with sustainable development objectives defined in documents such as the country strategy note (CSN). She referred to recommendation 8 (para. 73) in that connection. While her delegation concurred with recommendation 2 (para. 67), it believed that ensuring the effective use of resources was as important as the amount of resources provided.

Consideration should be given to incorporating the tasks described in recommendation 4 (para. 69) in the drafting of the country strategy note. That recommendation and recommendation 5 (para. 70) could have significant financial implications if they triggered a new series of reports and/or new activities. The Secretariat should indicate what savings or reductions would have to be made to accommodate the two recommendations. Her delegation had been under the impression that the United Nations system was already engaged in promoting the gender analysis referred to in recommendation 6 (para. 71) and wished to know where perceived deficiencies in the system were and what changes, if any, were envisaged.

Turning to section II of the report, she recalled that recent world conferences had concluded that investments in improving the health and education of women and their economic and political access yielded the highest return to society. The United Nations could play a key role in helping to eradicate poverty by focusing on mainstreaming a gender perspective, coordinating efforts and monitoring progress. Her delegation therefore supported recommendation 1 (para. 97). It also endorsed recommendation 2 (para. 98), since a participatory approach was essential to mainstreaming a gender perspective, which inevitably involved increasing women's participation in decision-making at all levels. Her delegation also agreed that the Council should ensure that its future monitoring activities on poverty eradication reflected a gender perspective (recommendation 4, para. 100).

With regard to section III of the report, her delegation was concerned that the recommendation in paragraph 135 invited the Commission for Social Development to play a part which both encroached on the Council's responsibilities and overstated the Commission's ability to coordinate inputs from other commissions. The Council must maintain its intended role under the Charter of the United Nations as the central policy body for matters within its

areas of responsibility. Accordingly, rather than expand the Commission for Social Development and its role in poverty eradication, the Council should define its mandate more narrowly. For the very reason that the Commission did not have expertise in poverty eradication, its meetings on that subject had been very general and of little practical use, tending to focus on renegotiating issues already negotiated in other forums.

The Commission for Social Development could perform a useful role in follow-up to the World Summit for Social Development by serving as a forum for promoting the formulation and use of national poverty alleviation plans or strategies and for exchanging experience on their implementation. Biennial sessions of the Commission could provide an occasion for discussion of national plans and actions in addressing the specific theme of the session as it related to the eradication of poverty. The General Assembly policy framework should be expanded to include: relevant specialized agencies, such as the International Labour Organization; various funds and programmes, such as the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA); and the inter-agency task forces of the Administrative Committee on Coordination. They played important roles in poverty alleviation and should report directly to the Council; their work should not be duplicated by other commissions. The review by the Council of the functional and regional commissions should be completed before any decision was taken regarding the proposed expansion of the role of the Commission for Social Development.

Dr. MAAZA BEKELE (World Health Organization) said that poverty was the major underlying cause of death, disease and suffering worldwide and that its root causes, and not only its symptoms, must be addressed. It was essential to return to the basic values of primary health care and to reverse the decline in levels of financial assistance. The United Nations System-wide Special Initiative on Africa was an important step in that direction. The poor must be perceived as partners in their own development, not as passive recipients of aid.

The World Health Organization (WHO) had identified approaches and strategies to optimize its efforts to eradicate poverty. The first approach recognized the need to target the poorest of the poor, taking into account geographical and seasonal variations in planning and resource allocation at the national and local levels. Secondly, it was essential to ensure that related

sectors incorporated health objectives in their programmes. Thirdly, external aid should be planned and programmed to complement national efforts.

One strategy required for the effective application of those approaches at the country level called for addressing major economic and social equity gaps through an assessment of the impact of various sectors on health. Secondly, it was important to encourage closer collaboration among public, private and non-governmental health care providers, which required that the role of government as the coordinator of development activities must be respected and strengthened. Thirdly, the capacity of women and of the poorest population groups to care for their health and that of their families should be reinforced. Fourthly, countries should receive support in reviewing their health and nutrition situations and developing people-focused national nutrition plans and policies in order to produce stronger populations, increase cognitive skills and decrease child mortality. A fifth strategy called for a high-level commitment to health as a national development priority, and a sixth, for a more cost-effective approach to improving the health of the poor, focusing on disease prevention. Lastly, a bottom-up approach should be promoted; the decentralization of decision-making was more effective than attempts to introduce sector-wide changes from the top.

Because health was a broad intersectoral concern, WHO worked at the country level in partnership with the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), UNFPA and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). The programme approach should be the starting point for joint government and external-aid planning and programming of intersectoral action. A common system-wide approach to health and its relationship to poverty was needed, and the current fragmentation of financing and technical cooperation, in particular in the least developed countries, must be reduced. WHO was an active participant in the common framework agreed upon to implement the plans of action of recent major international conferences.

Mr. INSANALLY (Guyana) said that his Government considered poverty to be the most formidable challenge to peace and development. It was waging a relentless campaign against poverty in Guyana, which affected approximately 40 per cent of the population. A national development strategy would soon be finalized to provide the framework for an action plan for poverty alleviation. His country fully subscribed to the 20/20 initiative and, despite its limited

resources, was devoting an increasing percentage of its annual budget to social services.

However, its efforts were severely constrained by an onerous debt overhang and by the negative effects of structural adjustment, whose impact on the social infrastructure had been particularly severe. His Government therefore was understandably anxious for the United Nations system to devise a common understanding of its problems, in particular, of the relationship between debt and poverty, between structural adjustment and poverty and between drugs and poverty.

The process of structural reform and economic liberalization had caused a deterioration of the social situation in many countries, particularly in Africa. The phenomenon of global poverty should provide a stimulus for a more coherent and coordinated response by the United Nations system.

Apart from the reservations expressed on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, most of the recommendations contained in the report of the Secretary-General on poverty eradication (E/1996/61) could be accepted. He commended the Department of Policy Coordination and Sustainable Development and all other bodies which were persevering in their service to development, including the regional economic commissions. His delegation recognized the particular importance of UNDP and welcomed the poverty strategies initiative it had recently introduced.

His delegation attached importance to the role of the resident coordinator, the field-level committee and the country strategy note. However, while direct country programmes provided useful support to the poor during the implementation of economic reforms, they alone could not promote economic recovery and growth and must be accompanied by national and international policies which encouraged the creation of an environment propitious to development.

Since poverty represented a major threat to international peace and stability, machinery must be established for closer coordination between the Council and the Security Council, with due respect for their separate mandates, including the possibility of joint meetings under Article 65 of the Charter. A closer working relationship between the Presidents of the two bodies and the President of the General Assembly was also needed, and the Council could make arrangements for consultation with non-governmental organizations under Article 71 of the Charter.

The dwindling resources allocated to development were a result of the perception planted in the public's mind that development was a wasted effort. Governments, the multilateral financial institutions and the United Nations system needed to do more to rally support for narrowing the dangerous gap which existed between the developed and the developing countries. It had become imperative and urgent for all concerned to make public advocacy and mobilization of resources an integral part of their work. During the First United Nations Decade for the Eradication of Poverty, there must be a concerted attack on poverty, and time-bound goals and targets must be set.

Ms. KOZIY (Observer for Ukraine) said that her delegation welcomed the proposals and recommendations made in the report of the Secretary-General (E/1996/61). It was extremely important that the international community had been able to achieve consensus on the problem of poverty eradication and had made commitments to eliminate poverty, most recently in the Copenhagen Declaration and Programme of Action of the World Summit for Social Development. The participation of Governments, specialized bodies and agencies of the United Nations system, non-governmental organizations and civil society in resolving the problems of poverty must now be expanded. Poverty eradication was a complex and multifaceted problem with both national and international causes. To eliminate it, comprehensive long-term measures were needed.

The main responsibility for formulating and implementing strategies and programmes for poverty eradication lay with national Governments. They must have the political will to combat poverty, improve living conditions and meet peoples' basic needs. Increased international cooperation and support from international organizations and agencies were needed to assist countries in their efforts.

Country programmes, in which resident coordinators played a vital role, were particularly important. The successful work of UNICEF, UNDP and a number of other United Nations bodies demonstrated the effectiveness of programmes based on the country approach. The coordination of measures to combat poverty was one of the primary tasks of the United Nations system in the context of its overall developme... work.

There was a need to rationalize the work of individual bodies, organizations and specialized agencies of the United Nations system, enhance their effectiveness, eliminate of duplication, and concentrate on priority

areas. It was advisable to hold joint meetings and consultations within the framework of the Administrative Committee on Coordination (ACC) in order to coordinate plans and programmes of activity and budgets. The task forces established by ACC should inform the Commission for Social Development and also the Council of the progress made in their work.

Her delegation supported the work of the International Labour Organization in implementing the Copenhagen Programme of Action in the area of employment. It also supported the efforts of other organizations and specialized agencies of the United Nations, including UNESCO. The elimination of poverty was a prerequisite for stable development. Her delegation shared the view that broad-based and steady economic growth in the context of stable development was necessary to ensure social development and social justice.

Mr. ALOM (Bangladesh) said that isolated enclaves of prosperity could not coexist for long with ever-enlarging areas of deprivation. The highest priority must be accorded to poverty reduction, which should be the ultimate goal of all development strategies. The quest for social justice and equity for the poor and the deprived remained as elusive as ever; yet the problems of poverty travelled beyond the poor themselves and the societies in which they lived.

Political leaders should make a full commitment to poverty alleviation; the problem of poverty had to be attacked frontally rather than accepted as an inescapable fact of life. The commitment had to come from a sense of compassion for the weak and disadvantaged; an appreciation of the ability of the poor to contribute to material production and growth; acceptance of a new value system of sharing and caring; and recognition of the constitutional right of the poor and disadvantaged to the fulfilment of their basic needs.

The eradication of poverty had been a priority goal in all major United Nations conferences since 1990; however, no quantifiable goals or specific monitoring mechanisms for the mobilization of resources had been established. His delegation therefore looked forward to adopting a time-bound action plan in regard to the implementation of the recommendation in paragraph 67 of the report (E/1996/61).

His delegation attached particular importance to the role of the resident coordinator system and the field-level committees. Country strategy notes should be country-driven, and national authorities should decide on the overall

strategies. There could be no direct or indirect conditionalities or restrictions on programme lending, which should be programme-specific and spontaneous. His delegation supported the programme-approach planning framework and the current practice of donor/government consultative mechanisms. The activities of organizations of the United Nations system should be coordinated so as to ensure that their efforts were complementary. Coordination between the relevant organizations and the recipient countries was equally important; his delegation supported paragraph 54 of the report in that respect.

It had to be recognized that: poverty was a country-specific problem with its origin in international and regional domains; the formulation of development strategies should be the primary responsibility of the Government; development and social progress remained the only real foundation of a stable and secure world for everyone; poverty reduction must be addressed in its totality, and not piecemeal; the growth-led model of development must accommodate a people-centred growth in which the pattern of growth was as important as its rate; a key catalyst was recognition that the poor were competitive and efficient; and development must embrace a system of values reflecting a moral and spiritual outlook above and beyond profit maximization.

New measures must be adopted to eliminate the stranglehold of the debt burden, particularly for the least developed countries. The skewed impact of structural adjustment measures on the weakest segments of society must be reduced. Coordination and coherence must be enhanced between the Bretton Woods institutions and the United Nations system to allow for greater accountability and transparency in line with United Nations economic and social policies.

The meeting rose at 4.35 p.m.